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Agca says he tried to blackmail U.S.

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ROME—Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turk who shot Pope John Paul II, admitted in court Thursday he tried to blackmail the United States government with a compromising letter to the U.S. military attache in Rome.

The letter, written in terms that indicated Agca knew the attache, was dispatched from jail on Aug. 5, 1983, only a few days after the young Turk had told Italian magistrate Ilario Martella he would disclose everything about the so-called Bulgarian connection, the alleged conspiracy against the life of the Pope.

Agca apparently felt the letter could serve him as a lever to force the U.S. administration to support his request for favored treatment. In return he would divulge the alleged KGB and Bulgarian plot to kill the Pope.

But Agca's scheme failed when the U.S. Embassy in Rome immediately handed the letter over to Italian authorities.

"I was playing a double game," Agca admitted during cross-examination. "You can consider the letter simple blackmail to force them [the Americans] into some kind of support . . . to throw them off the track."

Despite repeated questions, Agca remained vague on what kind of support he expected from the U.S. administration.

"All I can say is that I thought there could be a political solution, I thought it was possible to have me extradited to the Vatican, I just wanted an expression from

them that they would help," he said.

During the 45-minute interrogation on the letter, Sandiapichi barked at Agca, "You were trying to involve the Americans . . . You were trying to involve the American Secret Service, weren't you?"

Ill at ease for once, rubbing his palms together continually, Agca insisted he had only tried to find what he called a political solution and support for his request that he should be extradited from Italy to the Vatican state.

"No normal person could think of such an extradition," the judge snapped.

"But is legally possible," Agca said.

The "American connection" Thursday illustrated once more Agca's readiness to cheat, lie and involve people or governments if it serves his obscure ends.

But the Turk [who has often claimed to be the reincarnated Jesus Christ, an expert terrorist and "a master of psychology"] could almost be pitied as he became the butt of the judge's sarcasm.

"You wanted to involve a third country, didn't you?" Sandiapichi shouted.

"I wrote the letter to obtain support from the media . . .," Agca said.

"Did someone suggest this letter to you?"

Agca: "No. I have nothing to do with the American Embassy or the American government but before I talked about the Bulgarian connection it was already known that I had been in Bulgaria for months. The press knew these things."